

Chapter XV

ON ILLUSTRATION

WHATEVER method a teacher may be using she will constantly find the need of illustrations that will appeal to the individual pupil. The different kinds of illustrations used in teaching children are often classed in order of merit, thus:—

- (a) The thing itself—best of all.
- (b) A model of the thing.
- (c) A picture of the thing.
- (d) A description in words—of least value.

You will find this in many books on teaching. But it is evident that everything depends on what it is that we are trying to teach.

522. If we want a child to understand what an island is, or a peninsula, the thing itself is out of the question. We must use a model, or a picture, or both together, and supplement them with a good deal of verbal description.

523. Or, the child is to realize the meaning of numbers. In this case, as the thing itself is an abstraction, we cannot begin with it. The pupil must work with various kinds of concrete material until the abstract notion is grasped (231), and then we associate the idea with a symbol.

524. And verbal description, without model or picture, may be quite effective, if the child possesses clear mental images corresponding to the words the teacher uses. We have seen (203) how an iceberg or a glacier may be imagined by a child who has fairly distinct images of the blocks of ice he has seen in fishmongers' shops.

So there can be no hard and fast order of merit in types of illustration.

525. Music, by its very nature, forbids the use of models, pictures, or verbal description; so the music teacher need not worry over a choice of illustrations. She begins with *the thing itself*, for it is always at hand, and she has no roundabout process to consider. She says 'Listen,' gives a name to the thing heard, and when it is recognized in any combination she says, 'See, this is how we write that,' going straight from the thing to the symbol. It is true that in talking to little children we do not use the word symbol. We speak of the staff as a *picture* of sounds rising by thirds; of a modulator or a written scale as a *picture* of the scale-tune; and in those symbols there is a pictorial element which partly justifies the term. But we recognize that clefs, and sharps, and flats, and notes are symbols pure and simple—arbitrary signs that must be used along with the things they represent over and over before they are firmly associated with them (351).

526. Nevertheless, we sometimes need analogies and other illustrations in teaching music as well as in teaching other things, though not at all to the same extent.

527. What is an analogy? It is usually understood to be a comparison of two things, for the purpose of throwing light upon one of them. Properly speaking, it is a comparison of two *pairs* of things, or two *sets* of things, each pair or each set having the same kind of relationship to each other as the other pair has, and in the same kind of proportion.

528. For instance, when we roughly compare the strong accents in music to inch-marks on a foot-rule or stakes in a fence, what we practically say is: 'As the inch-marks are to the foot-rule, so the strong accents are to the music.' And when we show the strong accent marks (the bar-lines) in actual use, the seeing sense helps the hearing sense, the analogy is recognized, and the relationship of the more familiar pair of facts throws light on the relationship of the less familiar pair.

529. An analogy is not an exact parallel in all its details. In each complex there are some elements strikingly similar, but others which may not fit at all. So an analogy must be very lightly handled, else children (who love detail) will try to make it correspond in its every aspect, and then it is likely to miss its mark altogether.

530. Teachers sometimes overdrive an analogy. For example, in speaking to a class of children about the characters, or mental effects, of the scale-sounds, we find a *colour* illustration helpful. Children, if questioned, will often, from their own feeling, say that *soh* is red. The more sober blue will stand for *fah*, and the strength of *doh* is not badly symbolized by black. If the colour notion helps the child, or the beginner in listening of any age, to realize the character of those three important tones of the scale, we have gained much. But when an attempt is made to force an analogy between the seven scale-sounds and the seven colours of the spectrum the whole thing comes to grief, for the colours do not correspond with the mental effects. The only point of contact here is

the coincidence of the number seven; there is no real analogy at all. There are three colours in the 'Step' modulator, and in the beginning this appeal to the pupil's imagination is helpful. But to carry on the colour association too long would defeat our final aim, which is to fix the attention on the *sounds* themselves, their relations to one another, and their emotional effect upon our own minds, and not to divide the attention between sound and colour.

531. In illustrating mental effects with little children, for whom 'character' is too abstract and indefinite a term, we may find a helpful analogy with family relations. *Soh* is the soldier husband, upright and scarlet-coated. *Doh* is his wife, motherly and restful. *Me* is the eldest daughter, sweet and quiet. *Te* is Tiny Tim, always running to his mother, and so on. You can make up a very good family modulator in this way, but you must be careful that the children understand it as 'only a kind of fairy-tale.'

532. A method of music-teaching which had a vogue in London about thirty years ago was embodied in a charmingly written story, in which the notes took the character of soldiers, marching now slowly, now quickly—I forget the details now. The story would give keen delight to any one who already knew all about time-notation, but as a method of *teaching* time it was not very successful, because the relations shown were purely arithmetical and theoretical. The analogy was very cleverly carried out throughout the story, but the over-elaboration needed to cover the whole of

time-notation defeated its end, and the pupils were found to be helpless in the practical test of time-reading.

533. An analogy must have sufficient likeness for its purpose. Far-fetched analogies fail, because there is more arrest than fusion (398) among the ideas compared. The time-teaching in another method is based upon a far-fetched analogy with the flight of birds. Now in the marching of soldiers there is a definite notion of relations. We can imagine two steps taken in the time of one, an analogous relationship to whole-pulse and half-pulse sounds. We have a standard. But the flight of birds gives us no standard, no definite image at all. No one can imagine a bird flying exactly twice as fast, or four times, or eight times as fast, as another bird; and as some of the birds in the fable have no wings, it is difficult to imagine them flying at all. It would be very misleading if it had any meaning for the children. Fortunately, it does not convey much to them. What the children *do* learn from is the practical exercise connected with it, in which the teacher beats time while tapping out the pulse-divisions.

534. Happy illustration is the soul of teaching, but Professor Adams points out sundry dangers in connection with it.

(a) *The 'hand-to-mouth' illustration.*— If teachers do not prepare their lessons and their illustrations with an eye to the mental content of their pupils, but leave the illustrations to the spur of the moment, the danger is that they may demand from the pupils knowledge which

they do not yet possess, knowledge which in the teacher's richer mind is a commonplace and naturally leaps to the front, but which belongs to a stage in the pupil's progress which he has not yet reached.

(b) *The 'stock' illustration.*—Teachers who are constantly going over the same subject get into the habit of keeping certain effective illustrations 'on tap,' and using them over and over again. In this there is no harm, as long as the illustrations are not constantly trotted out in teaching *the same class*. We may have to repeat a lesson on one point several times to the same class, and when this is necessary we should provide fresh illustrations. But—

'The reproach of the stereotyped illustration is removed when it can be shown that it is a real touchstone of truth that may be applied to all uses within its sphere.' The interest here is kept alive by the application to fresh cases. The orange as an example of perception is used over and over again in text-books. It is such a good example that we cannot do better than use it.

(c) *Over illustration.*—'What is perfectly clear already needs no illustration.'

(d) *Using an illustration which proves more attractive than the point illustrated.*—If we try to teach the lines and spaces by pictures of little figures climbing over a five-barred fence—the heads of the little men representing *notes*—the child's interest is in the figures and their funny behaviour, and he loses sight of what we are attempting to 'illustrate.' This is one great

objection to an apparatus of any kind in teaching notation.

(e) *An allusion which switches off the attention from the lesson.*—It sometimes happens that a pupil in class gets into trouble for inattention, the fact being that he was following up a train of thought suggested by a passing allusion on the part of the teacher.

(f) Finally, there is *the temptation to allusions to oneself.*—The attention of a class may sometimes be attracted by a story of ‘What happened to myself,’ and occasionally a personal experience may be well used as an illustration of a general principle. But we shall not be tempted to this kind of sin if we remember that while a personal experience may *illustrate* a principle, it is no *proof* that the principle is true, and it is very often as proofs that such experiences are quoted. If a teacher indulge too often in reminiscences, the pupil, instead of preparing to be interested by the familiar beginning, ‘I recollect,’ prepares to be bored, as the grown-up hearer invariably is. It is better to keep the capital ‘I’ out of our illustrations as much as possible.

535. While all these warnings are valuable to the music teacher, perhaps the most valuable is (c) ‘*What is perfectly clear already needs no illustration.*’ In teaching notation, the amount of outside illustration needed is very small. The use of the time-names sweeps away the long table of note-values that divided the semibreve into thirty-two demisemiquavers and had so little

meaning for a child; so the time-honoured analogy 'as two halfpennies are to a penny, so are two crotchets to a minim (or two quavers to a crotchet)' is hardly needed. A child of seven, of average intelligence, can understand an allusion to halves and quarters; or to put it differently, a child who cannot understand such an allusion is too young to tackle the complexities of musical notation. Of course we may find a pupil of seven, or older, who is so undeveloped that we have to invent all sorts of devices to 'get at him.' But even then the pennies and halfpennies do not help very much, for the difficulty is not an arithmetical but a musical one. Not, 'Can he understand the analogy between note-values and money values?' but 'Can he *hear* two sounds in a pulse?' If he can hear, he gets the time-name, which links the ear-effect to the eye-effect, and further illustration is unnecessary. 'What is perfectly clear already needs no illustration.' But after the fact is realized and its notation understood, the ear needs further practice in observing and recognizing; and we must remember that as we can only teach music through music, so we can only illustrate music by music. When a new pulse-group has been presented, imitated, named, recognized in various combinations, and associated with its symbol, we must then let the pupil hear it and see it in its place in many musical examples.

536. In teaching pitch-relations we need copious illustrations. John Curwen's books are full of illustrations of mental effects culled from Handel, Mozart, Mendelssohn, etc., and in Section VI

PSYCHOLOGY APPLIED TO MUSIC TEACHING

of the 'Guide' I have suggested tunes adapted for use with children for the same purpose. Teachers will find others for themselves.

537. To sum up: What I want teachers to realize is that music teaching is less dependent on extraneous illustration than the teaching of other subjects, and that it is thrown back upon itself for most of the illustration that is necessary. And that is why this chapter is a short one.